DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 576 JC 030 455

AUTHOR	Holton, Nicholas
TITLE	Service Learning in the Rural Community College.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	11p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Faculty; Community Colleges; *Partnerships in Education; Rural Areas; *Rural Environment; *Rural Sociology; *School Community Relationship; *Service Learning; Student Participation; Two Year College Students; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Service learning is a pedagogical model that connects community service experiences with academic course learning. Large urban centers are often the leaders in developing service learning programs, due to the central locations of both institutions of higher education and community needs. This paper argues that rural areas have the same problems and require the same services. The paper uses Kirtland Community College, Michigan, as a model for development of a rural service learning program. The author debunks a number of myths concerning the difficulties of developing and the need for service learning programs in rural colleges and universities. It is generally believed that small rural community colleges are unable to financially support and sustain a comprehensive service learning program. Yet, a small college might actually find there is less bureaucracy to deal with, there are fewer people to convince of the efficacy of the proposal, and it may be easier to get a larger proportion of students to participate. It may also be easier to develop community partnerships because the scope of the interagency cooperation will be smaller and easier to organize. Argues for measuring the success of a program by the proportion of student involvement, the value to the community, and the example the students, faculty, and college set for the community. (NB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Service Learning In The Rural Community College

Nicholas Holton, Service Learning Coordinator
Kirtland Community College, Roscommon, Michigan
www.kirtland.cc.mi.us/servicelearning

ED 480 576

Introduction

Service learning is a pedagogical model that connects meaningful community service experiences with academic course learning. Large urban centers are often the leaders in community service learning opportunities. The urban population is centrally located and urban post secondary institutions can point with well-deserved pride to their outstanding community partnerships. These provide great experiential learning opportunities for students and valuable services to the community. Yet urban areas do not hold a monopoly on civic needs. Rural areas have the same problems and require the same services. Considering the great distances that rural areas encompass along with the lack of civic infrastructure and one can begin to picture the problem that rural community colleges face everyday in their struggle to increase student engagement. This paper will concentrate on turning these special obstacles into great opportunities for our students. The following examines problems for rural community colleges in four critical spheres of responsibility:

- College
- Community
- Faculty
- Students

TC030455

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
N. Holton
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Institutional Challenges in Rural Service Learning

Rural Community College Districts are often spread over large geographical areas.

Kirtland Community College is located in the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The district covers four counties, and the closest town is seven miles away. Almost entirely a commuter campus, many students drive fifty to seventy five miles (one way) to campus. Trying to coordinate service opportunities for students in this large region is a daunting task. One suggestion that has worked with our faculty is to discover a common community need in all the localities and allow students to work in their hometowns on the projects. For Example the KCC Nursing department has partnered with local health departments to have nursing students provide flu shots during the early winter months. These shots are free to the public and provide students with much needed practice while relieving the local health department personnel during this busy time of the year.

The rural community college district might have a common natural phenomenon that the college can use to create service opportunities. For instance, in our district the Ausable River nationally known for its great trout fishing and scenic beauty cuts right through the college district. Currently KCC uses students in the nature study class to do etymological stream studies. Soon the physical science course will be sending students to do water testing in the river near their home communities. The class will send this information to area stream conservation groups for use in restoring and maintaining the river ecosystem.

Small Rural Community colleges are often unable to financially support and sustain a comprehensive service learning program. Yet a small rural institution might find it easier to implement service learning courses. The bureauocracy of a smaller institution is usually very receptive to new and innovative teaching strategies. There are fewer people to convince of the efficacy of the proposal and less department members to persuade. At

Kirtland Community College there is only one full time history instructor. Thus, if he incorporates a service learning component in all of his courses, then 100% of history students will have a service experience. With this in mind the numbers of students at KCC might not be overwhelming when compared to large urban/suburban universities, but the proportion of students engaged in service activities at KCC will meet or exceed those of larger institutions.

Rural Communities Face Special Problems

Multiple community agencies contribute to the lack of any inter-agency infrastructure. It is this very lack of infrastructure that inhibits large-scale social service partnerships in geographically large rural areas. Smaller community institutions can aid in developing meaningful partnerships with rural community colleges. Usually one or two college officials can meet with local agencies and effect an agreement that is easily ratified by the administrative leadership of the two organizations. These partnerships can be easily initiated, developed and implemented. Since all stakeholders lack large bureaucracies, colleges can track and nurture these relationships and maintain contacts at community agencies.

Unfortunately at small civicly engaged rural community colleges there are always a small number of individuals who spearhead the service learning movement on campus. These people must work to institutionalize service learning throughout the entire campus, hoping the movement will survive the loss of key people when they leave or retire.

The rural community college can take the lead in an area that lacks any cohesive entity for coordinating community services. By sponsoring a community agency summit, the college can facilitate a new spirit of cooperation in seemingly unconnected organizations. From this start, agencies can better coordinate their efforts, eliminate duplicated services and provide more valuable community service experiences for college students.

What does "neighborhood" mean in a rural area? In urban and suburban communities, the concept of neighborhood is well entrenched in the American lexicon. Yet as service learning practitioners in a rural setting, we must be willing to expand our concept of community to include a much wider geographical area. This could include the entire county, parish, reservation, Pacific Island or any region with a common defined community need. Recently a student at Kirtland Community College has started to document the need for a countywide housing code in one of the counties in the KCC district. She has created an awareness video depicting the problem, and she has shared it with local township officials. Additionally, she is doing an inventory of all substandard housing using the National Habitat for Humanity model that she will share with county officials to improve the housing situation in her *neighborhood*, namely the whole county.

Small population densities mean a lack of service opportunities. This is actually a myth based on the small scale of community services that are often found in small rural communities. Many people think that living in the "country" eliminates all social problems. Sometimes parents in urban and suburban areas will send their troubled youth to the "country" schools to get their kids away from trouble. Unfortunately these children

find the same temptations and trials that exist in the city. The sad reality is that rural areas experience the same problems that urban and suburban communities face. Thus the need for social services is just as important and the opportunities to engage in service are proportionally just as plentiful. It is important for the rural community college to find innovative ways to harvest these service ideas and maximize the impact on the local communities.

Creating community partnerships is especially difficult in rural areas. Since college personnel live all over the large geographical distances of rural colleges, it is hard for them to be familiar with all the community agencies in all localities. It therefore becomes increasingly important for the college to become creative in harvesting contacts and potential partners. Kirtland Community College has addressed this problem by having students in a humanities courses take the lead in the recruitment of community partners. Students in the "Individual and the Society" class have interviewed district community service agencies to see which ones are the most receptive to having college students "volunteer" at their organizations. The agencies are then contacted by a Kirtland service learning professional and encouraged to become KCC Community Partners, which includes participation in college sponsored events, student referrals for community service and a listing in a searchable database through our web page. These partners will be contacted each year to gain feedback and criticism of the service learning placements and potential for new initiatives.

Challenges Faced by Rural Service Learning Faculty

Rural service learning faculty have little support for their programs. Large colleges have budgets that can support well-established institutionalized offices for service learning. These college offices coordinate activities, place students, develop and nurture community partnerships and conduct program assessment. To try to do all of this at a small rural community college is virtually impossible. Small colleges need to take advantage of the support of state and national organizations. Campus Compact and the American Association of Community Colleges are just two organizations that have recently devoted considerable resource to the problems of rural community colleges. The Service Learning Exchange has a network of peer mentors that will provide free technical advice for any faculty needing assistance.

Faculty are unable to network with other service learning practitioners. This is true in small colleges everywhere. The service learning professionals on campus need to work diligently to create an atmosphere of collegiality on campus for all current and prospective service learning practitioners. Last year, Kirtland Community College hosted a regional service learning workshop and had several smaller social events designed to promote the services opportunities in individual courses and allow for service learning instructors to meet and discuss their projects, successes and challenges. It is important for the smaller rural college to ensure networking opportunities for faculty especially when professional development budgets are often the first to be reduced in times of fiscal restraint.

Rural service learning faculty get little recognition or rewards for service learning. Fortunately, few professors expect that community service would or should be an avenue to recognition. The very notion of getting rewards for performing service to our community seems almost heretical. Yet without some way to reward the extra work involved to incorporate service learning into a curriculum, many faculty will eventually tire or lose interest. So service learning professionals should initiate ways to encourage increased participation and reward years of dedicated service. To this end I suggest that rural community colleges participate in state level award programs. If the state does not have an award program, then initiate one. The first place to start is with your state campus compact. Michigan Campus Compact sponsors the Outstanding Faculty Award given each year at the annual faculty institute. Member campuses are encouraged to nominate an award winner from each campus. Although there is no monetary award, the winners receive a certificate and other tokens of appreciation. Their names are then forwarded to the local news media for publication. A small gesture, yet one that invariably provides a positive boost for faculty.

The rural community college can sponsor team-building events on campus for service learning participants. At Kirtland Community College the service learning faculty cadre has started a tradition called the "Service Learning Spring Fling". Service Learning students, faculty and administrators are invited to a luncheon and are asked to share their successes and challenges from the past year. Prospective service learning faculty are encouraged to attend and a representative from the state campus compact is there to provide resources and technical advice. The KCC service learning faculty cadre started

with approximately a dozen faculty members in 1999. This has now grown to include approximately half of the full time faculty, all of the instructional administration and many part time faculty.

The Kirtland Community College budget has little room to sponsor expensive service learning projects, but with the help of small startup grants from the state Campus Compact and from the American Association of Community Colleges our faculty have been able to start service programs in many new and innovative areas. We have used grant money to produce a video that is available at www.kirtland.cc.mi.us/servicelearning. These small grants have given faculty the needed boost to start programs that would have withered for lack of support. Positive public recognition, coupled with local team-building activities supported with a dedicated mini-grant program goes a long ways to support and nurture fledging programs.

Students Face Unique Challenges in Rural Areas

Student engagement is often sporadic on the rural campus. This is due to three seemingly insurmountable obstacles. First, the rural community college is often a commuter campus. As described earlier, Kirtland students often drive fifty to seventy five miles one way to campus. This creates two or three hours of "road time" per day. Students often balk at having to do anything that adds to their commute. The college can help students ease their commuting woes and still require service by developing service opportunities in all local communities. Although not an easy task, the college needs to recognize the special obstacles that rural students face and endeavor not to add to the problem.

Another serious problem for the rural student is the basic demographics of the student population. With a median age of 28-30 and a majority being females (and mothers) the rural student is often focused solely on academic and personal survival. Trying to explain the great opportunity to provide services to the community is dismissed by many of our students as something that has little to do with training for a career and therefore is circumspect from the beginning. Again, the rural community college has an obligation to provide ways to encourage civic engagement while understanding the unique circumstances faced by a large contingent of the student body. Kirtland Community College has started to overcome this obstacle by initiating an online student senate. Still in the pilot stages, the online student senate allows topics of general interest to be discussed in an asynchronous environment so formal meetings are convened less often and are more productive. We think this is the only one like it in the nation. At least we have not found another yet. It is not perfect and has not eliminated the need for regular meetings, but more students are given a voice and the result has been better representation for all.

Community college programs are designed to be a two-year experience. Many rural students then need to move to larger urban or suburban areas to complete their education. So the college develops the leadership potential of its students just in time for them to move to a university, who then gets the benefit of the training. The college in general and the faculty in particular need to constantly recruit and develop replacements for the steady talent drain inherent in the two-year college. Students who get their first taste of

civic engagement and service learning at the community college with be more likely to return to the area (or at least another rural area) to live, work and contribute to their community.

Conclusion

The rural community college faces obstacles that other colleges can avoid. Fortunately many of the very things that are viewed as obstacles can be viewed as opportunities and some are even (although well disguised) advantages. It is easy to see small rural colleges as the backwater of the service learning movement. Yet upon closer examination, many of the most innovative and unique programs are happening in these colleges. Collegiate service learning programs should not be judged solely by the number of students involved. If this were the only measurement, the rural community college would always seem to be a weak participant. Rather, I contend that service learning programs should be measured against a standard of the proportion of the student body involved in service, the value of the service to the community and the example the college, faculty and student body sets in the local community. If a low number (but high percentage) of the student body are actively engaged in meaningful community service that provides quality experiential educational opportunities, then the college can point with pride to their students, faculty and community partners.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Blanket)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

All Publications: Service Learning in the Rural Community College

Series (Identify Series):

Division/Department Publications (Specify):

Publication Date: Summer 2003

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☑

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, please

Signature: Nicholas Holton

Printed Name/Position/Title: Nicholas Holton / Service Learning Coordinator

Organization/Address: Kirtland Community College

Telephone: [redacted] FAX: Ext 412

E-Mail Address: holtonn@kirtland.edu Date: 9-19-03

989-275-5000 Ext 412

989-275-8745

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: info@ericfac.piccard.csc.com
WWW: http://ericfacility.org